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AUTHOR Ensign, David
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ABSTRACT

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education developed a pilot parent education program that began in 1981 and was available to parents of children in the state's 543 school districts. In 1984, the state legislature provided funding for the program and mandated that it be made available to all parents of children under 3 years of age, and the program's name was changed to Parents as Teachers. The program provides information and support to families through: (1) personal visits by trained parent educators who help parents address concerns such as their children's language development; (2) group meetings, at which parents and educators share strategies for coping with children at different stages of development; (3) screening of children for developmental and health problems; and (4) centers where parents can bring their children to play. An evaluation of the pilot project revealed many successful outcomes, including children's improved academic and social development and parents' improved knowledge about child rearing. The report presents descriptive measures of the program's success. The report also discusses the implications of the program for programs in other states and countries, and the future of the program in Missouri. (PM)

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Missouri's Parents as Teachers

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by David Ensign

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Mary Ann Lucas, a parent educator in Normandy School District, St. Louis County, is showing a puppet to Tiffany while her parents, Willie and Lynne Jones, look on. Photos courtesy of Parents As Teachers' National Center

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In Brief

The first three years of life are critical in the development of a human being.

Combining that seemingly simple premise with the idea that parents are a child's first and most important teachers, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education developed a program of parent education that is available to Missouri families through all 543 school districts in the state.

Through a cooperative effort of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Danforth Foundation, four local school districts and the Center for Parent Education, the New Parents as Teachers pilot project began in 1981 and ran for four years. Independent evaluation of the pilot program, which provided services only for new, first-time parents, yielded results that have brought the program international attention.

When the legislature provided funding to take the program statewide as part of the Early Childhood Development Act of 1984, it mandated that the services be made available in all Missouri school districts to all parents of children under age three. The name was then changed to Parents as Teachers. Originally funded by the Legislature at $2.8 million for services to 10 percent of the eligible population in 1985, program funding from the state has increased to more than $11 million to reach at least 30 percent of the eligible population in 1988-89.

Introduction

"People know more about a new car when they get it than they do a new baby when they bring one home." That line is repeated often by administrators in the Missouri Parents as Teachers program.

Filling this information gap is the heart of this program selected by The Council of State Governments as an innovative state program. Parents as Teachers now provides an array of services designed to provide practical information and guidance on language, cognitive, social and motor development in young children. More than 50,000 Missouri families are taking advantage of this voluntary program. The information used in the program is based on the seven phases of development from birth to 36 months outlined by Burton White, Ph.D., in his widely read guide, *The First Three Years of Life*. Dr. White, former director and principal investigator for the Harvard Preschool Project and present director of the Center for Parent Education, served as senior consultant to the Missouri pilot project.

As the Early Childhood Development Act recognizes, more than 20 years of research indicates that "a child's most productive and influential years of learning occur before the age of five." Further, the bill acknowledges, early failure to develop adequately in language development and social skills leads directly to underachievement in school.

"[T]he period that starts at eight months and ends at three years is a period of primary importance in the development of a human being," Dr. White wrote in *The First Three Years of Life*.

His findings form the theoretical foundation for Missouri's initiative in parent education. In addition to developing a body of research detailing the importance of early childhood education, Dr. White found that parents play a more important role in a child's early educational development than does the formal educational system. Unfortunately, he also found that parents in the United States have little research-based information on developmentally and educationally sound child-rearing practices. Moreover, he found that even if such information were available, there would be no formal systems to deliver it to new parents.

The Early Childhood Development Act (SB 658, sponsored by Sen. Harry Wigging, D-Kansas City) recognized this deficiency and defined the role of early schooling as assisting families in providing a sound educational foundation.

The local districts provide services based on the pilot projects that ran from 1981 through 1985 in four Missouri districts. These services include personal home visits by trained parent educators, parent group meetings facilitated by the parent educators and developmental screening.

In independent testing conducted by Research & Training Associates of Overland Park, Kansas, the services in the pilot project produced results:

- New Parents as Teachers children scored significantly higher on all measures of intelligence, achievement, auditory comprehension, and verbal and language ability.
- Project children ranked at the 75th percentile in mental processing and the 85th percentile in school-related achievement on the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children. Comparison group children scored in the 55th and 61st percentiles.
- Project children performed well regardless of socioeconomic disadvantages and other traditional risk factors.

Anticipating positive results from the pilot, the Missouri Legislature passed the act mandating that districts across the state make Parents as Teachers programs and services available to families who chose to participate.

Background

"You've got to have a belief on the part of the districts. We've been at it since 1972, diligently preaching the gospel of good parenting of young children," said Arthur L. Mallory, commissioner of education during the development of Parents as Teachers and when the Early Childhood Development Act was

passed.

Early childhood education in Missouri dates back at least to 1972, when Mallory hired Mildred Winter to direct that section of the state education department. Winter now directs the Parents as Teachers National Center in St. Louis. This early collaboration was a public-private partnership that included Jane Paine of the Danforth Foundation. They worked together from the beginning and brought to Missouri the experts who were instrumental in launching Parents as Teachers.

Parents as Teachers traces its roots to those early efforts which also occurred during a period of burgeoning research in early childhood development. Parents as Teachers was a natural outgrowth of Missouri's leadership in early education and the state of the research, said Winter.

By 1981 the stage was set for a pioneering effort. With major funding and support from the Danforth Foundation and with the cooperative effort of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and four local school districts, the New Parents as Teachers program got off the ground.

Using a grant from the Danforth Foundation, the project engaged Dr. White as senior consultant. Using Chapter 2, ECIA funds, districts were granted $30,000 each for the first year of program development and implementation. The program was guided by an executive committee that included Mallory, Winter, Paine and White. Under the supervision of Dr. White and others from the Center for Parent Education, program personnel were trained and first-time parents were recruited.

The project began in 1982 with 380 families from a variety of backgrounds. The four school districts — Ferguson-Florissant (St. Louis County), Farmington (St. Francois County), Francis Howell (St. Charles County), and Independence (Jackson County) — represented a broad spectrum of characteristics including urban, suburban and rural.

The program began providing services to the families in the final three months of pregnancy. The program continued at the same level of funding — $30,000 per district annually — through 1985.

In 1984, the Legislature passed the Early Childhood Development Act authorizing funding for:

- developmental screening for children, ages one through four;
- parent education for families with children, birth through age four; and
- parent-child programs for developmentally delayed three- and four-year-olds.

The programs are voluntary for parents but each district is required to provide them. Commissioner Mallory designated the New Parents as Teacher project as the model for parent education under SB 658. The state began training parent educators and administrators and developing guidelines for implementing the rest of the bill.

In 1985, Missouri Gov. John D. Ashcroft indicated that developmental screening for one- and two-year-olds and parent education for families with children birth to age three should be the funding priorities for SB 658. The Legislature appropriated $2.8 million to provide services for 10 percent of the eligible population. Missouri has approximately 250,000 children eligible for Parents as Teachers services.

During the same period, the evaluation of the New Parents as Teachers project was completed and the results released through *The New York Times*. Among the results reported: parents in the program indicated nearly 100 percent satisfaction with the services and information.

Parent demand moved the Legislature in 1986 to increase funding to $5.7 million to provide screening for 20 percent of one- and two-year-olds and parent education for 20 percent of families with children under age three.

In 1986, the second wave of testing and evaluation of Parents as Teachers began in 37 districts. By 1987, the state had begun planning for a longitudinal study of children from the pilot project.

The Legislature increased funding to $11.4 million to provide existing services to 30 percent of the eligible families and to extend screening and parent education through age four. Also in 1987, the Parents as Teachers National Center was established at the University of Missouri-St. Louis to provide training and certification for parent educators and to provide information and training in response to the growing number of requests from schools and other agencies in other states.

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Program Description

"We're not a super baby or hot-house program. We aim to help parents get the most out of the first three years, not to create a seven-year-old out of a three-year-old," said Deborah Murphy, director of early childhood education for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Parents as Teachers is a multifaceted system of delivering information and providing support to parents of young children. The program includes personal visits, group meetings, screening to monitor children's development and drop-in and play times at local centers.

Local districts are reimbursed by the state based on the number of contacts between parent educators and a family. Guidelines call for offering families eight contacts per year. To receive full funding, districts must provide a minimum of five contacts per year of which three must be personal visits.

Parents beginning the program agree to be full and active participants and the parent educator promises that the child will not reach age three with any undetected developmental difficulties. Further, the program promises to provide information and guidance concerning any discovered problems.

Personal Visits

During personal visits, parent educators can provide advice and information tailored to the stage of development of the individual child. The visits allow parent educators to develop a personal relationship with the whole family and gain the trust of parents and children. Through the ongoing relationship, parent educators can help parents monitor the child's development and provide information on issues such as discipline, toilet training or language development as they occur.

Although home visits are preferable because they tend to be more relaxed, some visits may take place at Parents as Teachers centers. While this allows individualized attention, the more institutionalized setting can inhibit parents and children, making it difficult for parent educators to gauge a child's progress, according to some parent educators.

Group Meetings

The group meetings provide an opportunity for parents to share experiences and for parent educators to provide general information on child development. These meetings often serve as support sessions for parents dealing with typical yet often frustrating situations such as temper tantrums or the testing of limits that is common to young children between 14 and 24 months.

Meetings usually include a formal session with a video presentation or an outside speaker. Some parent groups are following a videotape series produced by Dr. White outlining each of the seven stages of child development from birth through age three. Group meetings also include a discussion session.

Ideally, these meetings are scheduled at times convenient to working parents. Most groups try to schedule meetings that can include both mothers and fathers.

Group meetings show parents that others are going through similar problems and provide a means of sharing strategies for coping. Parent educators provide general information about the stages of development, appropriate toys, helpful and educational activities as well as ideas about inexpensive alternatives to traditional toys such as homemade play dough.

Throughout the program, parent educators are encouraged to take advantage of community resources, such as speakers from various community agencies. When such resources are used, meetings can function as a means of referral or networking with available social service resources.

This type of networking is common in Parents as Teachers. Parent educators work through community agencies like clinics, hospitals and family service workers when recruiting families for the program. This involvement helps keep other social service professionals aware of Parents as Teachers, and it also helps keep parent educators aware of available services their families may need.

To further enhance the program's visibility, the state has launched a public awareness campaign. Through public-service announcements, flyers and posters, the state hopes to improve participation which is currently at about one-third of the eligible population.

Screening

The Early Childhood Development Act spells out the role of screening in Parents as Teachers: "Screening is not designed to label some children as delayed or advanced but to identify areas of development where delays or advanced conditions may exist."

The program screens for language development, general development including motor development and hand-eye coordination, hearing, vision and general health. Procedures include using the Zimmerman Preschool Language Scale and the Denver Developmental Screening Test.

Drop-in Time

Local Parents as Teachers centers in schools, early childhood centers or other local facilities provide places for parents to bring children for play times.

The drop-in times encourage interaction among the children as well as networking among the parents. Parent educators staff the centers during drop-in time and are available to answer questions, play with children or just talk with parents.

Evaluation

The New Parents as Teachers pilot project was one of the most successful and highly praised achievements in child development and education research in the United States during the past 25 years.

Initiated in 1982, the evaluation of the pilot program was completed in 1985. Conducted by Research & Training Associates, the project evaluation attempted to answer 10 questions comparing pilot program participants to a matched comparison group and to the national norms. They are as follows:

• Do program children demonstrate better intellectual and language development?

Program children scored significantly higher on all measures of intelligence, achievement, auditory comprehension, verbal ability and language ability. In mental processing, program children ranked at the 75th percentile and in school-related achievement at the 85th percentile, in contrast with the comparison group which scored at the 55th and 61st percentiles, respectively. (The Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children and the Zimmerman Preschool Language Scale were used.)

• Do program children demonstrate more positive social development?

Program children demonstrated significantly more aspects of positive social development, being able to distinguish a self-identity, to have positive relations with adults, and to demonstrate coping capabilities.

• Do program children have fewer undetected hearing problems?

Parents in the program were significantly more likely to report having had their child's hearing professionally tested by age three. Children whose hearing had not been checked showed more signs of lacking in verbalization skills.

• Are program parents more knowledgeable about child-rearing practices and child development?

Program parents were more knowledgeable about the importance of physical stimuli in the child's environment, about constructive discipline

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and about the developmental stages used in the program.

- Were program staff successful in intervening in at-risk situations?

Staff identified children as being "at-risk" based on criteria such as family stress, poor quality of parent-child interactions and delayed language development. Tested outcomes indicated that these children performed more poorly on all measures of intelligence, achievement and language development. By age three, half of these identified risk conditions were reported as corrected or improved.

- Are characteristics of risk related to a child's development at age three?

Traditional measures of risk such as parents' age and education, income, single-parent families, number of younger siblings and the amount of alternate care received bore little or no relationship to the achievement of children in the program. Program parents and children performed well regardless of traditional risk factors.

- Is the extent to which parents participated in the program related to project outcomes?

Program staff rated parents' participation. The higher the quality of that participation, the better children performed on all testing measures.

- Do parents with certain background characteristics tend to be better participants?

Frequency of participation was about the same among both at-risk and not at-risk families. However, at-risk families were rated as having a lower quality of participation.

- Does participation impact on parents' perceptions of the school district?

Fifty-three percent of program parents rated their district "very responsive" versus 29 percent from the comparison group.

- Do participants have positive feelings about the program's usefulness?

Nearly 100 percent of the participants reported a high degree of satisfaction with each of the project services. Ninety-seven percent of the parents felt that the services made a difference in the way they perceived their parenting role.

A longitudinal study of children from the pilot program is underway. The study will follow the families through the children's formal educational years.

Parents as Teachers is currently in the midst of its Second Wave phase of testing. This round of independent evaluation will involve 37 diverse districts, including St. Louis and Kansas City. While the 1985 evaluation studied pilot project children and parents and a comparison group, the second wave testing will evaluate the statewide implementation phase of Parents as Teachers.

Until those results are in, the program is relying on descriptive measures to evaluate its success. Key findings include that by 1987-88, 278 districts were providing more contact hours per family than required by state funding guidelines.

The program also continues to draw support from a wide audience. These supporters cite numerous benefits of the program that go beyond its early childhood education mandate.

"It's a family responsibility program that goes far beyond education," said U.S. Sen. Christopher Bond. Bond was governor when the legislature passed SB 658. "We passed it not just as an education program," he said.

Gov. Ashcroft, who oversaw the program's initial funding as well as the subsequent funding increases, shares his predecessor's enthusiasm. Like many supporters of Parents as Teachers, both Bond and Ashcroft feel that the program will have significant impact on issues other than early childhood development. While no studies have been done to support these suggestions, anecdotal evidence does indicate that the program may have some preventive effect on repeat teenage pregnancy, dropout rates and child abuse.

Parents as Teachers has adapted the program to meet the needs of teen parents. Local high schools have cooperated by allowing group meetings to be held in the schools during school time.

Although the curriculum for teen parents follows the same developmental stages, it also includes issues of particular concern to teenagers. Group and personal meetings may include discussions of dealing with parents or school friends, staying in school, relationships and repeat pregnancies.

In one teen program in the St. Louis area, a group of 95 teen mothers experienced fewer than five repeat teen pregnancies. Nationally, about half of all teenage mothers will have a second child while still in their teens. St. Louis school administrators plan to study repeat pregnancy and dropout rates to compare the teenagers in Parents as Teachers with those who do not participate in the program.

Parent educators are trained to detect signs of possible child abuse and neglect and are educated about community resources for handling abuse situations. One of the benefits of home visits is the opportunity to detect potentially abusive situations and to try to provide suggestions to help parents cope without becoming abusive.

While the state has done no studies to date, program administrators cite instances of "hot-lining" parents and of getting medical attention for neglected children to support their feeling that the program is having an impact on this problem.

Administrators hope the longitudinal study of children from the pilot project will support their feeling that the program will reduce the need for remedial education in elementary school. Remedial education can cost more than 10 times the current $300 per child expenditure of Parents as Teachers and three times the per child expenditure of the pilot program.

One benefit of Parents as Teachers has been a better feeling among parents toward the schools. Parent satisfaction with the program remains remarkably high and this early positive contact with the schools has left many parents feeling much more positive. Although it is too early to know the long-term consequences of the early relationship between parents and schools, parent educators and Parents as Teachers administrators have been inviting elementary school principals to get involved with the program and to prepare for a generation of parents who are more actively engaged in their children's education, better informed about educational needs and more willing to become an active partner in meeting those needs.

The program also helps the children realize the importance of education. "When parents spend time reading to their children, engaging in activities that stretch their children's minds and help them develop their skills, it's an indication to children that reading, learning and engaging in the mind is an important part of everyday life. If the program would do nothing else (and we know that it does much more), simply demonstrating to children that parents think learning is important is a marvelous model of what's important about life," said Gov. Ashcroft.

Although it enjoys widespread support in Missouri from parents, educators, the Legislature, the governor and the business community, the program has its critics. The most significant voice raised against the present program in Missouri is that of Burton White. His criticisms focus on four points: premature expansion; using the program to serve populations for whom it was not intended; insufficient funding leading to limitations on services; insufficient training for parent educators and for those from other states coming to St. Louis.

During the four years of the New Parents as Teachers pilot project, the program served 380 families in four districts. Within four years of the end of the pilot, Parents as Teachers operates in more than 500 districts and serves more than 50,000 families.

As the pilot project neared completion, plans called for expanding gradually over the course of 10 years — building first to 25 districts, then to 80, and finally going statewide after continued testing at each level of expansion. However, to sell the program to the Legislature, the eligible population was expanded to ensure equal access to services statewide. Children with extraordinary needs also were included.

Dr. White was opposed to expanding too far too fast. He also strongly opposed serving special needs families because the Parents as Teachers model was not designed to serve them. "The program is meant specifically for the 85 percent of children not facing critical needs," he said.

To avoid contaminating research results, the model New Parents as Teachers also was designed specifically for first-time parents who had not developed ingrained parenting styles or habits. These parents, according to the model, would be more open to the suggestions of parent educators. However, the Missouri program, as passed by the Legislature, opens Parents as Teachers to any parents of appropriately aged children.

Both the rapid expansion of the program and of its target population have strained its budget. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education estimated the cost of delivering services in the pilot project at between $800 and $1,000 per family. But the current program is being operated on a state expenditure of $170 per family ($255 for families with two children in the program) with local school districts making up the difference from the estimated cost of $200 to $300 to provide current services. District contributions averaged $67 per family in 1986-87. With parent educator salaries the primary driving force behind program costs, actual service costs vary considerably depending on location.

The present staff of parent educators carries a heavier load, delivers fewer services and sometimes gets paid less than was the case with the pilot. The average case load during the pilot was one full-time and one half-time parent educator for every 60 families. While case loads vary widely from district to district, in urban areas one parent educator often handles more families than one and a half educators faced during the pilot.

As a result, personal visits have been pared down from the monthly visits of the pilot program to five per year in some districts. More than half of Missouri's districts (including St. Louis and Kansas City) provide monthly contacts.

Budget limitations also have created cuts in parent educator training. Parent educators now must successfully complete a 34 hour pre-service training and at least 55 hours of in-service training (although most attend more) over the next four years. Parent educators for the pilot had to complete 17 full-time days of pre-service and 30 days of in-service over the following three years. Dr. White's guide, *The First Three Years of Life*, covered during pre-service for the pilot, is now a prerequisite to pre-service training.

The 34-hour training for Missouri parent educators is also being used as training for administrators and parent educators from other states attracted to Missouri by the success of the pilot program. Dr. White leveled his strongest criticism at this aspect of the program. "Missouri is advertising its program based on the results of the pilot. They're advertising pilot results and selling a post-pilot product. State governments are being duped," he said. He questioned whether officials from other states can be prepared to start up and run a Parents as

Teachers-type program after only 34 hours of training.

Parents as Teachers administrators and supporters share some of Dr. White's concerns but strongly contest his conclusions. They note that in his strongest criticism, he is comparing training for a research project to preparation for replicating a working model and suggest that most of his criticisms reflect his research orientation.

(Administrators in Rhode Island, Texas and California — states with some of the most extensive pilot programs — all praised the training and support they have received from the National Center.)

Among those clamoring for the program's services have been parents of the developmentally disabled. While recognizing that the curriculum is not designed specifically to meet special needs and that it is not a substitute for specialized help, the program's administrators feel that much of the content of Parents as Teachers is suitably applicable to families with special needs.

"We're doing what always happens in public education," said Mildred Winter, director of the National Center. "When something works, you make it available to the widest population possible."

Most of the program's administrators agree that a phased-in approach would have been better. When it came to getting legislative support for Parents as Teachers, however, the overwhelming sentiment was that going statewide was better than no program at all. Missouri politics offered no other choices at the time.

As with any state program, Parents as Teachers is run on a budget. Administrators would like to see the state fully fund the program to its estimated cost of $300 per child annually, but they feel the program is not seriously underfunded as it stands.

It seems likely, however, that funding levels will continue to be a source of controversy. Cutting back on training, services and salaries (as well as eliminating a few start-up costs incurred during the pilot program) has enabled Missouri to offer Parents as Teachers at a lower cost now than during the pilot phase. Whether this affects results remains to be seen.

Given the preparedness of the applicants for parent educator positions — approximately 90 percent of whom hold teaching certificates — program administrators are pleased with its rigorous training and continuing education. (While teacher certification does not mean qualification in working with children during the first three years of life, Missouri's training program is designed to provide that qualification.)

At this point, program administrators are waiting for the results of the second wave evaluation with the firm conviction that they will vindicate the state's approach and answer any remaining questions about the quality of service, personnel or training.

Transferability/Other States

The evaluation of the Missouri pilot project brought Parents as Teachers international attention. The results attracted media coverage from as far away as New Zealand. The program's potential has not been lost on educators looking for ways to improve delivery of early childhood education services.

To deal with the numerous out-of-state requests for information and training, Missouri established the Parents as Teachers National Center. The center also serves as the central training site for Missouri parent educators. The state education department has a contractual arrangement with the University of Missouri-St. Louis and the National Center to provide training services for Parents as Teachers.

Representatives from local school districts in 30 states have contacted the National Center for information or training. Local pilot projects or replication sites have been established in 20 states.

In 1988, the Washington Legislature passed Parents as Teachers legislation for pilot projects based on the Missouri pilot. Also last year, the California Legislature passed a bill to fund Parents as Teachers pilot projects but Gov. Deukmejian vetoed it citing duplication of existing pilots as well as the existence of other parenting education programs in that state. The bill will be reconsidered this year. Similarly, the Kansas Legislature is considering a Parents as Teachers bill that would fund pilot projects. Program advocates in Texas and Rhode Island are considering taking proposals to their Legislatures. Officials in each of these states cite the Missouri program as the model for their efforts and many of them have received training at the National Center.

While the basic structure of Parents as Teachers undoubtedly can be used with success in any state, there are several potential problems with direct transfer of the Missouri program.

States attempting to duplicate the Missouri program should note Dr. White's criticisms while recognizing that political and economic realities will probably force similar compromises on the speed of program development and the breadth of services offered. States also should encourage as much local administrative involvement as possible. The Missouri program, in its present phase, enjoys its greatest success where it has the enthusiastic support of local school administrators.

The basic structure of the present program differs very little from the pilot project. The differences are of degree, not of structure or function. The overwhelming success of the former indicates that the statewide program could achieve similar results if the degree of difference proves to be insignificant. States which would like to duplicate Missouri's program should look at both the pilot

and the present structures. Ideally, the services used in the pilot project could be duplicated. It seems unlikely, however, given Dr. White's withdrawal from the Missouri program, that the training parent educators received for the pilot program can be duplicated, and it is too early to tell if the training provided at the National Center for out-of-state visitors will be adequate to support other states' attempts to transfer Parents as Teachers.

When asked about the biggest challenge those in other states will face when attempting to begin a Parents as Teachers-type program, administrators and parent educators have said that recruiting families is a far larger barrier than any of the areas targeted by Dr. White. Although parent satisfaction has been remarkably high, getting parents to take the first step and enter the program has been challenging from the start.

Current funding includes a special provision for reaching "hard to reach" families, including low-income families. The extra time involved in multiple phone calls, canceled appointments or "no shows" has driven up the cost of delivering services in such cases. The challenge to parent educators, who are responsible for recruiting, has been to show prospective families that the program has something to offer.

This challenge has occurred with families from various backgrounds. Parent educators meet the challenge with various styles but one common approach is to show parents something useful and relatively simple about child development. Often it is as simple as stressing the importance of talking with an infant long before the child is able to respond. While adults often feel silly talking with someone who doesn't talk back, this early communication is extremely important to language development. Such pointers often open otherwise closed doors.

Doors are opening to children's issues at every level of government and other states are taking their own routes into early childhood education. In October 1987, Gov. Ashcroft convened a national conference, "Investing in the Beginning," to focus attention on public policy options for young children and their families.

Programs outlined during the conference are among the notable state actions in early childhood education.

The Arkansas Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) targets educationally disadvantaged four- and five-year-olds. In-home parent instruction helps guide mothers through a 15 minute-per day, five day-per week, 30 week-per year program for two years.

The Colorado Community Infant Project is a primary prevention and early intervention program designed to help parents from the prenatal period through the early years. The project targets at risk families and focuses on providing a coordinated effort to deliver social, public health and mental health services through county agencies.

The Illinois Ounce of Prevention program is a public/private partnership also targeting at risk families. The program is designed to deliver current information on parenting and child development through community-based projects in more than 40 Illinois communities.

Kentucky's Parent and Child Education (PACE) program helps parents without high school diplomas who have three- or four-year-old children. In three weekly sessions, parents attend adult education classes while children receive preschool education.

Based on the same premises as Parents as Teachers, the Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education program is designed for all families of young children. The parent-child program follows a child from birth to kindergarten and helps parents facilitate early childhood learning and development.

Future Outlook

The reaction to the results from the pilot project continues to be overwhelmingly positive at all levels in Missouri. Legislators report that Parents as Teachers is one of the state's most popular programs and that their constituents actively support the program. The governor also is a strong supporter.

The program continues to enjoy the enthusiastic support of former governor and current U.S. Sen. Christopher Bond. Upon leaving the statehouse, he called Parents as Teachers his most important achievement as Governor, and he remains a staunch advocate. "When I look back I feel more convinced than ever," said Sen. Bond. As a senator, he has worked to provide federal grants for demonstration projects in other states.

The program has rapidly grown from a four district pilot serving 380 families to a statewide program serving more than 50,000. It now faces the challenge of the typical growing pains associated with delivering services to a large and expanding pool of families.

The Legislature has funded the program through 1989 to serve up to 30 percent of the eligible population. As that target portion is increased, the Legislature will be called on to increase funding. Local districts also will face demands for increased funding.

At this point, such increases seem likely given the popularity of the program. When legislators face the funding decisions, their votes will be swayed by words like those of one grandmother who said, "I wish I'd had this program when I was raising my kids."

Parent Educator Training

The field workers who recruit families, go into homes and provide parent education services are called parent educators. Qualifications for a parent educator include one of the following four steps *and* completion of step five.

1. Certification in one of the following:
   - Elementary Education
   - Early Childhood Education
   - Early Childhood Special Education
   - Vocational Home Economics
   - Occupational Child Care Services and a demonstrated ability to work with young children *and* their parents.

2. A two-year associate degree or two-year certificate program in Early Childhood Education, Child Development of Nursing and a demonstrated ability to work with young children *and* their parents.

3. Sixty college hours and two years of experience in a program working with young children and their parents.

4. Five years of experience in a program working with young children and their parents.

5. Completion of department-approved training in parent education regardless of previous training and experience according to the following schedule:
A. A minimum of 30 hours pre-service training.
B. A minimum of 20 hours in-service training during the first year of employment in an approved program.
C. A minimum of 15 hours in-service during the second year in an approved program.
D. A minimum of 10 hours in each of the next two years in an approved program.

Parenting experience is *strongly recommended* but not required. Pay ranges between $8 and $16 per hour for part-time parent educators. While some of the range is due to level of experience, pay also varies considerably among districts. At this point, about 90 percent of the parent educators hold teaching certificates so full-time employment usually brings pay and benefits on the district's teacher pay scale. This higher-than-anticipated proportion of certified teachers has increased program costs somewhat. However, most parent educators work part-time. This holds down costs and allows more flexible scheduling to accommodate working parents.

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For additional information about Parents as Teachers, contact the Parents as Teachers National Center in St. Louis, (314) 553-5738. Dr. Burton White can be contacted at (617) 964-2442.

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